

VZCZCXRO9847
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHLB #1481/01 1301403
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 101403Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3473
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BEIRUT 001481

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2012
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [UN](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: SCENE-SETTER FOR VISIT OF IO/AS
SILVERBERG TO LEBANON

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

Lebanon is divided

11. (C) Summary: Your visit to Lebanon will underscore USG interest in Lebanon, and the role of the United Nations here. PM Siniora and four of his ministers visited Washington and New York April 17-22 to discuss the government's reform efforts and U.S. support for the country in its transition to democracy. Neither we nor the Lebanese made any specific commitments. Siniora's visits to the White House and later the UN were successful, and showed both Lebanon and Siniora in a positive light. Back at home, Siniora has faced criticism from his opponents for visiting Washington as well as for promoting of an economic reform plan that contains austerity measures, and increased taxes, bound to be unpopular locally. The National Dialogue process, begun in early April by Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri, was initially successful in lowering communal tensions, but after several weeks of inactivity, appears to have run its course. The rivalry between the pro-reform "March 14" coalition (consisting of blocs led by Saad Hariri, Walid Jumblatt and Samir Ja'ja') and the pro-Syrian "March 8" coalition (led by Hizballah and Amal with Michel Aoun as a loose affiliate) is as heated as ever. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, who heads the pro-reform government, claims a mandate to pursue the goals of "March 14," but the way forward has not been easy since he took office in July 2005. Lebanese sovereignty has been under attack during his term in office, and "governance by consensus" has limited Siniora's ability to push for closure in the Hariri assassination case. Pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud remains in office in defiance of UNSCR 1559 and is an additional obstacle to reform. End Summary.

A Momentous Past Year

12. (C) Fouad Siniora, longtime associate and political supporter of assassinated Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, took office as Prime Minister in July 2005. Supporting the government is a 71-member (out of 128) parliamentary majority, elected in May-June 2005 and led by Hariri's son, Sa'ad. Siniora's 24-member Cabinet began its work just months after the April 2005 withdrawal of Syria's military and overt intelligence personnel from Lebanon. Although undoubtedly you will hear valid criticism of the election law used, the May-June Parliamentary elections were relatively fair and free, thus rendering Siniora's cabinet was the first genuinely "made in Lebanon" government after nearly 30 years of de facto rule from Damascus.

¶3. (C) The pro-reform, pro-sovereignty March 14 coalition is led by the younger Hariri, along with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'ja'. This coalition takes its name from the massive rally held in Beirut one month after the elder Hariri's murder on February 14, 2005. The coalition's stated political objectives are: determining the truth and meting out justice in the Hariri assassination, restoring Lebanon's sovereignty, and pursuing much-needed, but long-delayed reforms.

¶4. (C) Facing the pro-reform bloc is the "March 8" coalition (also named after the date of a rally, only a pro-Syrian one, in 2005), composed of the Shia movements Hizballah, led by Hassan Nasrallah, and Amal, led by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri. Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, with 21 parliamentary seats, mostly Maronite, often sides with Hizballah and Amal on political issues and entered into a "cooperative alliance" with Hizballah on February 6, with the issuance of a joint communique that outlined common political goals. Michel Aoun has made clear on numerous occasions his desire to be Lebanon's next president.

¶5. (C) The unique nature of post-civil war Lebanese politics makes the Siniora Cabinet more like a miniature Parliament (minus Michel Aoun's bloc) than an executive body controlled by the parliamentary majority. In it are ministers belonging to, or at least serving at the pleasure of, Hizballah and the Amal Movement -- the "March 14" coalition's primary, pro-Syrian opponents. This situation has made it difficult for Siniora to govern effectively.

¶6. (C) Syria's ally Hizballah remains a state-within-a-state, with its own militia arguably stronger

BEIRUT 00001481 002 OF 005

than the Lebanese Armed Forces. Hizballah has ignored UNSCR 1559's requirement that they disarm and give way to the deployment of Lebanese Armed Forces along the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel. Hizballah justifies its violent actions by claiming that is a legitimate "resistance" to Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms, which it and many other Lebanese parties claim to be Lebanese territory. This claim is not widely shared by the international community.

Economic reform agenda: bitter pills to swallow

¶7. (C) Prime Minister Siniora has assembled a capable economic team and forged ahead in drafting a detailed reform program. Its goal is to bring under control Lebanon's mammoth debt-to-GDP ratio. Beyond fiscal adjustment, the government also wants to increase economic growth and employment by making Lebanon an easier place in which to do business. The plan includes some social safety nets. Siniora's opponents accuse the PM of proposing a plan that would exact a high social cost from the Lebanese people, already overburdened with taxes.

¶8. (C) The "Core Group" of friends of Lebanon -- including the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the UN, and the World Bank agrees that Lebanon enjoys an unprecedented window of opportunity for support for a credible and sustainable reform program. The government's economic team understands this well, but -- as demonstrated by today's labor demonstration against Siniora's cabinet and reform plan -- has not won domestic political "buy-in" to the program.

The Political Reform Agenda:
Changing how the people pick their leaders

¶9. (C) The Siniora government recognizes that political reform must accompany economic reform priority. While still

a work in progress, the new draft electoral law as currently written will introduce reforms, including the establishment of an independent commission to oversee elections.

¶10. (C) Changing the electoral status quo will not necessarily benefit the "March 14" parliamentary majority in the next election. PM Siniora will face a challenge in shepherding a draft law, once it is finally produced, through his cabinet and on to the Parliament. For now, he simply needs a final draft law, now slated for announcement in late May.

¶11. (C) A series of national dialogue sessions -- hosted by Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, with Siniora, as well as Aoun and the leadership of Hizballah and Amal at the table -- has tentatively agreed to ask Syria to demarcate the Syrian-Lebanese border, establish normal diplomatic relations between the two countries, and restrict armed Palestinians to the camps. The dialogue also affirmed the Lebanese identity of the disputed lands known as Sheba'a farms. However, the talks show no sign of cutting through the immediate impasse over the Lahoud presidency, as well as the longer-term problem of Hizballah's disarmament.

UNIFIL and safeguarding the Blue Line

¶12. (C) You will visit the headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which was created in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal and to help Lebanon re-establish control of the border with Israel. At present, the force is made up of just under 2,000 troops under the command of French Major-General Alain Pellegrini.

¶13. (C) In the past year, incidents of varying degrees of intensity took place along the Blue Line, although the last incident of major fighting was in November 2005. Most recently, on December 28, 2005, unidentified persons fired 122mm rockets into Israel from Lebanon. On February 3, 2006, Hizballah and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) exchanged fire in the Sheba'a Farms after the IDF shot a Lebanese shepherd near the Blue Line. Israeli overflights have continued, most recently spiking on May 1 when UNIFIL observed 10 Israeli jets crossing the Blue Line

BEIRUT 00001481 003 OF 005

¶14. (C) There is a widespread assumption that Syria and Iran manipulate Hizballah to stage attacks across the Blue Line. The Syrian and Iranian connection with Hizballah (which receives up to \$480 million per year from Iran for its military, political, and social service activities) is disruptive to regional stability, given the Israeli retaliation that it provokes and the attendant pressure on the Siniora government.

¶15. (C) In December 2005, the Secretary-General recommended the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate. The Security Council subsequently approved (on January 31, 2006) resolution 1655, which extended the mandate by six months to July 31, 2006. Important new points in the resolution -- compared to previous ones renewing UNIFIL's mandate -- included specific mention of Hizballah, recognition of Lebanese government efforts to strengthen cooperation with UNIFIL, urging of the Lebanese government to do more to assert its authority in the South, and the Security Council's intention to continue to review the mandate and structure of UNIFIL in order to adjust the force, as appropriate, to its mission.

¶16. (C) The Lebanese government has made some limited progress of late, such as the LAF's co-location of its liaison offices with UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura. Also, the Joint Security Force (JSF), an amalgam of the ISF and LAF, has more actively patrolled southern Lebanon. However,

the JSF remains well below its advertised level of 1,000 personnel.

Sheba'a Farms and the Lebanese-Syrian borders

¶17. (C) The Sheba,a Farms comprise about 24 square kilometers of land, occupied by Israel after the 1967 war, and located in the southern Lebanon-Syria border area. Importantly, the Sheba,a Farms lie south of the Blue Line (i.e., in Israeli-occupied territory), which the UN had demarcated in 2000 for confirming Israeli withdrawal from its occupation of southern Lebanon. The Blue Line is not a final border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel or the Israeli-occupied Golan, but it does stand as a point of demarcation in which both sides, Lebanon and Israel, are to enforce their own sovereignty and respect the sovereignty of the other party.

¶18. (C) The United States and other western countries view the Sheba,a Farms as Israeli-occupied territory of the Syrian Golan. The Shia, led by Hizballah, insist that the Sheba,a Farms are Lebanese territory, which renders Hizballah,s efforts to liberate this land a legitimate resistance to occupation. The national dialogue recently affirmed the Lebanese identity of Sheba'a Farms. Syria has remained vague in its statements of Sheba'a calling it simply "Arab lands." Complicating matters are the differing opinions on where exactly the boundaries of the Shebaa Farms lie as well as the status of nearby villages. Accordingly, there is recent interest in demarcating the border between Lebanon and Syria, which could produce an outcome that declares the Sheba,a Farms to be Lebanese. The Syrians might support such a finding, since it would give legitimacy to Hizballah,s military efforts against Israel. It is also important to note, however, that when the UN demarcated the Blue Line in 2000, for confirming Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the Lebanese government assented to the demarcation carried out by the UN which put the Sheba,a Farms south of the Blue Line and thus in Israeli-occupied territory.

UNIIIC and the Hariri investigation

¶19. (C) A second major UN-related issue here is the UN International Independent Investigation Commission, established by UNSCR 1595 in mid-2005 to investigate the February 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Serge Brammertz replaced Detlev Mehlis as the commissioner in January 2006. The Commission began its work in summer 2005, has issued three reports on the assassination, one in October and a second in December. The UNIIIC reports have pointed the finger at Syrian complicity in the assassination, as well as likely knowledge of it on the part of four leading former Lebanese security service heads, who are now jailed on the order of the Lebanese judiciary.

BEIRUT 00001481 004 OF 005

¶20. (C) Serge Brammertz issued his first report in March ¶2006. He confirmed that the commission would continue to press for cooperation from the Syrian authorities. In April 2006, Brammertz traveled to Syria and interviewed President Asad. UNSCR 1644 of December 2005 extended the mandate of the UNIIIC for another six months, through June of 2006. UNSCR 1644 also calls for the UN and Lebanese authorities toward the possible establishment of a special tribunal with internatioanl character to try the Hariri assassination suspects, and expand the Commission,s work to cover not just the Hariri assassination, but all 16 bombings, assassinations, and attempted assassinations in Lebanon since October 2004. You will be meeting with Lebanon,s lead negotiators for this tribunal, judges Ralph Riachy and

Shoukri Sadr. They and Lebanon's Justice Minister, Charle Rizk, are unhappy that the UN's Office of Legal Affairs, led by Nicolas Michel, has not been as energetic as they would like in working toward a joint Lebanese-UN agreement on the special tribunal. But their motives are political as much as judicial: they want to absolve themselves of responsibility for a politically-charged and potentially dangerous trial, by shifting witnesses, detainees, etc. to the special tribunal.

Follow-up to UNSCR 1559

¶21. (C) After the adoption of UNSCR 1559 in September 2004, the Secretary General appointed Terje Roed-Larsen as his Special Envoy to monitor implementation of 1559. Larsen issued his third report on implementation, under the authority of the Secretary General, on April 18, 2006. As of this writing, the U.S., UK, and France are co-sponsoring a resolution to follow up this report, with the objective of giving momentum to 1559 implementation. Key requirements still outstanding are the disbanding and disarming of all militias (this includes Hizballah for us, though not all Lebanese would agree), the extension of Lebanese government control over all Lebanese territory, and achieving strict respect for Lebanese sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence. On these issues, we advocate delineation of the Syrian-Lebanese border, and establishment of embassies between the two countries. Syria is resisting a dialogue with Prime Minister Siniora on these and other bilateral issues.

Supplementary Background on Lebanon and the United Nations

¶22. (C) Despite the importance of the UN in Lebanese politics, the Foreign Ministry still has not yet proposed a permanent Representative to take over their UN mission in New York. The post has been vacant since 2004. Because of the high level of UN attention given Lebanon, the Foreign Minister (he is one of the five Shi'a boycotting cabinet meetings) personally follows UN-related portfolios within the ministry. During your visit with the Foreign Minister, it would be helpful for you to ask him when his government plans to fill key diplomatic posts such as New York.

¶23. (C) UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) was created in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal and to help Lebanon re-establish control of the border with Israel, among its objectives. At present, the force is made up of just fewer than 2000 observers commanded by French Major-General Alain Pellegrini. In the past year there have been incidents of Lebanese violations of the border. Most of these violations have been attributed to either Hizballah or to Palestinian rejectionist groups operating inside Lebanon. A series of incidents of varying degrees of seriousness has continued along the Blue Line. Attacks also have been launched from outside of the designated UNIFIL area of operations in southern Lebanon. Most recently, on December 28, unidentified persons fired 122mm rockets into Israel from Lebanon. (There were no fatalities on the Israeli side.) Israel responded with air strikes within a few kilometers of Beirut International Airport. In December 2005, the Secretary-General recommended the renewal of UNIFIL's

SIPDIS

mandate. Discussions on UNIFIL mandate renewal will take place this month in New York. The foregoing issues, as well as others such as Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory, and which infringe on Lebanese sovereignty, will be raised.

¶24. (C) Geir Pedersen, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for Lebanon, took up his present mandate in

SIPDIS

November 2005. His newly-expanded mandate includes economic and social development issues as well as peace and security. This effectively makes Pedersen the head of all UN-related activities in Lebanon. Pedersen's previous portfolio was limited to southern Lebanon. He is widely experienced in regional issues including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Pedersen and his small staff manage all of the political issues in Lebanon from the Blue Line to support for democratic reforms.

¶25. (C) As noted above, perhaps the highest profile UN body in Lebanon is now the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC). (UNIIIC Brammertz, mindful of attempts to paint him as a USG tool, maintains a distance from us. When we do see him, he cites the independent nature of his commission in declining to share information on the substance of his work. We have thus not requested a meeting for you with Brammertz.) We stand with Egyptian President Mubarak, British Foreign Secretary Straw and French President Chirac in their public calls for full Syrian cooperation with the UNIIIC. We expect the international pressure on Syria to continue. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) does not play a major role in development in Lebanon. The organization organizes regional conferences and monitors development trends for reporting purposes.

¶26. (C) UNRWA is another important UN organization for Lebanon, with PRM playing the lead role for our relations with the organization. UNRWA's Lebanon field director, Richard Cook, is now working with the GOL on alleviating some of the worst humanitarian issues of Palestinian refugee camps. The government of Lebanon is an uneasy partner in refugee issues, especially on the highly sensitive issue of the refugees, future. Lebanese are very concerned that the 300-400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon not be resettled in Lebanon. Most of the refugees reside in camps outside the direct control of the Lebanese government. Most are Sunni Muslim, and their permanent settlement in Lebanon would not only present a severe economic challenge to this densely populated country, but it would alter the even more highly charged issue of Lebanon's internal confessional balance. Palestinian issues are colored by some fear, still lingering after the civil war, of armed Palestinian groups both inside and outside the refugee camps. Of particular concern is the PFLP-GC, which has mounted armed attacks against Israel from Lebanese soil.

¶27. (C) Lebanese citizens and their government do not believe their judicial system is capable of following up on the UNIIIC conclusions about Syrian complicity without international involvement in the investigations and subsequent trials. However, there is much suspicion of the UN, especially among Lebanese Shia, who see all UN activity as eventually leading to implementation of UNSCR 1559. During your meetings here, you will be asked to reassure Lebanese that the international community remains committed to helping Lebanon discover the truth of Hariri's assassination. You will ask face the conspiracy theories that the U.S. is about to make a deal with Syria at Lebanon's expense, and we recommend that you repeat at every occasion that U.S. support for Lebanon is strong and non-negotiable.
FELTMAN